

1991

Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 26

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Franklin, Phyllis, "Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 26" (1991). *Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991)*. Paper 58.
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MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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NEW YORK, NY 10003

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9/90
3 July 1991 9 AM 9:29

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
335 SROB
Washington, DC 20510-3901

Dear Senator Pell:

On behalf of the MLA Executive Council, I again write to you about the nomination of Carol Iannone to the NEH Council on the Humanities. Questions raised in the public discussion of the nomination require comment, and I call your attention to four issues.

First, Mrs. Cheney suggested on public television that the MLA Executive Council was not authorized to speak for the membership of the association. By virtue of the laws of the state in which the MLA is incorporated (Maryland) and by virtue of the MLA's constitution, the MLA Executive Council, which is elected by the membership, is empowered to conduct the business of the association and to speak for the membership.

Second, and more to the point, we think it necessary to comment further about Dr. Iannone's qualifications. Claims have been made that the brief book reviews Dr. Iannone writes for Commentary magazine are equivalent to scholarly and critical articles that require many months of research and thought. Dr. Iannone's Commentary book reviews, which constitute the bulk of her publications, are respectable examples of their kind, but they are not equivalent to scholarly and critical books and articles considered necessary in the academy to establish a distinguished scholarly record in the humanities.

Beyond the apprentice work of her dissertation, Carol Iannone has not designed, written, and published even one substantial scholarly or critical study of literature that allows other scholars and critics to judge the merit of her work. It would be unthinkable that a person with a PhD in science who had never designed a major experiment, never conducted or supervised a substantial research project, and never published the results of this research so that other scientists could judge its merit would be eligible for a comparable position on the board of the National Science Foundation.

Claims have also been made that Dr. Iannone's writings are read by larger numbers of people than the publications scholars produce. Although no objective way exists to measure how many people read the magazines and journals they purchase, there is a way to measure the extent to which scholars and writers in the arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences use one another's published writings. With the aid of the Arts and Humanities Citation Index and the Social Sciences Citation Index we have been able to determine how widely Dr. Iannone's writings are referred

to by others, and we have compared the citations to her work with the citations to the work of the two other nominees for service on the NEH council: Michael J. Malbin and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.

The information referred to below and in the attached table comes from the Institute for Scientific Information, which compiles lists of authors and articles or books cited in the major journals in various disciplines. As the attached Table 1 indicates, from 1981 to 1990, Dr. Iannone's publications were cited a total of 8 times; during that same period, Michael J. Malbin's publications were cited a total of 232 times, and the publications of Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., were cited 164 times.

We note for your information that Commentary magazine is indexed and cited in the Social Sciences Citation Index and is also cited in the Arts and Humanities Citation Index. In fact, authors who write for Commentary magazine are cited with some frequency. From 1981 to 1990, as the attached Table 2 indicates, the two citation indexes show that Commentary articles were referred to by writers in other journals 5,112 times.

We believe these data support the MLA Executive Council's judgment that Carol Iannone's nomination is premature: she has not yet developed the scholarly record required for service on the NEH council.

In addition, Dr. Iannone's supporters argue that her Commentary reviews establish her as representing the public sector, as a "public intellectual." We see two problems with this view of her nomination. Because Dr. Iannone has a higher degree in the humanities and is a faculty member at a university, appointing her to represent the public sector would blur what is now a reasonably clear distinction between the two sectors. Furthermore, because she has no record of leadership in public humanities activities in New York City or New York State, there is no evidence that she could make a strong contribution to the NEH council in this category. By contrast, Mary J. C. Cresimore, the NEH council member Dr. Iannone would replace, has an impressive record of volunteer leadership in cultural affairs both nationally and in her home state of North Carolina.

Third, Dr. Iannone's supporters charge that the MLA questions her nomination for political reasons. The record does not confirm this charge. The MLA has not opposed other nominees to the NEH council, although in recent years many, if not all, of them seem to share Dr. Iannone's opinions. For example, Peter Shaw, a new appointee, is, like Dr. Iannone, a vice president of the National Association of Scholars, and both are contributing editors to Academic Questions. While their views may be similar, their scholarly credentials are not. Because Dr. Shaw's record as a scholar meets the legislative requirement, the MLA did not question his appointment.

Finally, the MLA council is concerned about the way Dr. Iannone's

political views have been used to shield her from valid questions about her qualifications. In an editorial endorsing Dr. Iannone's appointment (copy enclosed), the Washington Post declared that the nominee's political views provided the basis for her nomination and dismissed the legitimacy of questioning her credentials as a scholar. This strategy of insisting that people who hold particular political views are exempt from meeting legislative requirements for appointment to the NEH council may fit the current needs of Dr. Iannone's supporters, but the long-term consequences for the NEH are profoundly troubling.

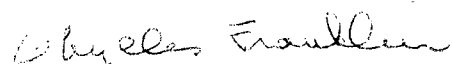
We understand that all Presidential nominees and appointees can be expected to have political views compatible with those of the President. But appointing NEH council members solely for their political views will inevitably compromise the credibility and effectiveness of the NEH council and undermine the purposes for which the NEH was established. I quote below from the enabling legislation two points in Section 2 of the Declaration of Purpose, which highlight the importance of the legislative requirement that council members have records of distinguished service:

(7) that the world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit;

(8) that Americans should receive in school, background and preparation in the arts and humanities to enable them to recognize and appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of our lives, the diversity of excellence that comprises our cultural heritage, and artistic and scholarly expression;

I apologize for the length of this letter. I know that you and the other members of the Senate Committee are busy with many important matters. The MLA council regrets that this issue has become far more acrimonious than anyone could have reasonably expected, and we appreciate your thoughtful attention to our concerns. With good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Phyllis Franklin".

Phyllis Franklin
Executive Director

CITATION COUNTS FROM THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES CITATION INDEX
AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES CITATION INDEX*

Table 1: Citation Counts for Nominees to the NEH Council**

Nominee	<u>Years of Citation</u>		
	1981-85	1986-90	1981-90
Carol Iannone	1	7	8
Michael J. Malbin	112	120	232
Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.	94	70	164

Table 2: Citation Count for Commentary

Journal	<u>Years of Citation</u>		
	1981-85	1986-90	1981-90
<u>Commentary</u>	2,569	2,543	5,112

* The Arts and Humanities Citation Index encompasses 1,300 of what its compilers describe as the world's leading arts and humanities journals, plus relevant social and natural science journals.

The Social Sciences Citation Index covers more than 1,500 of what its compilers consider the most important social science journals published here and abroad. In addition, articles relevant to the social sciences from over 2,400 journals in the natural, physical, and biomedical sciences are included.

Both indexes include citations to books, articles, letters, editorials, reports of meetings, and works of art and literature, as well as citations to reviews of books and live performances appearing in the journals covered.

** In compiling the citation counts for the nominees, the following were eliminated from the initial citation lists: self-citations; citations in comprehensive bibliographic reviews of the literature; and citations to different scholars with similar names. In counting the remaining citations, multiple citations in a single article were counted as separate citations.